

Bayside Groups Freedom Leader Guide

2025



Freedom Group Leader's Guide

The Purpose of Freedom Groups

To introduce people to the person of Holy Spirit and help them learn how to speak to Him, hear from Him, and live life with Him on a daily basis.

“Freedom is not the absence of something, but the presence of someone.”

My Freedom is made up of:

1. Self-Study – Daily time in Bible study and the My Freedom Workbook
2. Pastoral Teaching- The videos you show at the beginning of each class.
3. Group Discussion – Weekly “circle time”

Prior to the First Meeting

- You will receive an email confirming your group participants are in Planning Center.
- Begin praying for each member of your group.
- Contact your group participants via a phone call, email, or text. Make sure you receive a response from each person. Also be sure to let them know to come to the first class with the week 1 self-study complete.

Setting Up the Meeting Room

- Set up chairs for the number of people you are expecting. Have a couple of extras available, if needed. Organize the chairs in a circle, or as close as possible, so that everyone can see the facilitators and see each other.
- Pray over the room and the chairs inviting Holy Spirit's presence into the space.
- Set a welcoming atmosphere. This can include worship music playing as people enter the room. You may also provide refreshments, but it's best to keep it very simple.

- Have name tags and encourage everyone to use them.
- Make sure you have tissues positioned and available to everyone in the room.
- Have a sign-in sheet and remember to input attendance after each meeting in Planning Center
- When you have two (or more) facilitators, it's a good idea to have one person greet each person as they enter, while the other(s) stay seated in the circle and get to know people a little as they take their seats.
- Begin each group with prayer. In week two or onward, you might ask if anyone in the group would like to “pray in.”

Meeting Guidelines

Briefly Explain the Structure of the Workbook

- Each week there are five days of reading and reflection to work through. Encourage people to work through one day at a time, if they can. But any which way they engage with the material is fine.
- Encourage people to attend every group session whether they've been able to work through the material or not. Holy Spirit has plenty to say to them either way!
- Point out that the right-hand page is designed to have them read a scripture or contemplate the reading material, ask Holy Spirit to reveal what He wants them to understand about it, and then reflect on how that can be applied to their life.
- Note that in Week 3 (Jesus week) Pastor Jordan extends a salvation invitation in the introductory video. If Holy Spirit leads you, feel free to ask the group if anyone took that opportunity to commit or recommit their life to Christ. “We want to celebrate with you!”
- Explain how week 5 works before you adjourn week 4! There are a total 6 heart blockages which they will need to explore and possibly clear, so there are six days to work through.

1. Pride
2. Fear
3. Unbelief
4. Rejection
5. Bitterness
6. Trauma

- Make sure to point out the page on “Forgiveness” at the end of Week 5. This page may be applicable as they work through each of the 6 days!
- Point out the renouncement prayer at the bottom of the right-hand page of each day.
- IMPORTANT: If you ever have to “double up” and cover two weeks in one group meeting, double up two other weeks, perhaps week 3 and 4. It’s best not to double up week 5.

Managing the Clock

- Begin and end the group discussion (i.e., “circle time”) right on time. Set the expectation that people need to arrive prior to start time and that they can expect to be released on time.
- Divide the class time by the number of people in the circle. While you don’t want to literally set a stopwatch, it is important that each person has a chance to share. So, clock management and facilitating accordingly is very important.
- Let people know that you may ask them to wrap up their comments, if they go long. Be prepared to give a signal if they need to start wrapping things up or it’s time to move on to the next person.
- Be sensitive to people’s time commitments, whether that be getting into church service on time, picking up their kids from childcare, or simply getting on with the obligations of their day (or night).

Creating a Safe Space

- In Freedom, circle time is special. At the beginning of the first meeting make sure every person understands:

- o The circle is for sharing what Holy Spirit has revealed to you this week.
 - o What is shared here stays here.
 - o No counseling or trying to “fix” other participants. We want everyone to feel able to share freely without the fear of being taught, corrected, or preached to.
 - o Each person in the circle will have only a limited time to talk so that everyone gets a chance to share every week.
 - o The facilitator may respond after a person shares but may also leave space or silence to let Holy Spirit minister.
- Once you have let everyone know the parameters, you can refer back to them to facilitate and guide the discussion as needed.
 - Let the group know you may be leaving space and even leave silence (at times) to allow Holy Spirit to do the ministering. There can be a tendency to try to console, affirm, or “help” people deal with what they are feeling. We want to be life-giving and accepting without trying to solve the problems that only God can solve.
 - Moments of silence can be uncomfortable, and group members may want to fill the silence with comments. Letting them know ahead of time about these moments lets them know to allow silence and not jump in with their own comments or solutions to what someone just shared.
 - **NOTE:** The safe space extends beyond the circle. Help everyone understand that the goal of Freedom is for people to learn to encounter Holy Spirit. So, we don’t pounce on people as soon as circle time is over to correct their theology, provide book recommendations, or offer suggestions for how to handle the life situations they just shared about.

Starting Your “Circle Time”

- You may choose to begin the first week with an ice breaker. But do it quickly to leave plenty of time for group discussion. The best ice breakers require a one-word or one-sentence answer. You can ask something like:
 - o “How long have you been at Bayside?”
 - o “When did you move to Florida? What state are you from?”

- Remember to play the video at the beginning of each group session. This is designed to “tee up” the circle time and get every heart postured to hear from Holy Spirit.
- The role of a group leader is to facilitate the group not to teach. Freedom groups are an experience to be had, not a class to be taught. As a group leader you are facilitating an experience not disseminating information, teaching, or preaching.
- In order to help people develop a conversational relationship with Holy Spirit, start your meeting by setting up the right question . . .

“What did Holy Spirit reveal to you this week?”

- Avoid going through the material day-by-day, such as . . .

“Does anybody have anything on day two?” - Not Recommended

- Try not to make the conversation an assessment of the material . . .

“What did you think about this week’s reading?” - Not Recommended

- Get comfortable with asking the following question in a variety of different ways . . .

“Based on the reading and the questions this week, what has Holy Spirit been revealing to you?”

Model What You Want Them to Do

- One facilitator might open the meeting by sharing something that moved them about this week’s material. It’s best to work through the workbook just like your participants are and share what Holy Spirit has revealed to YOU this week! Make it real and current!
- Keep these things in mind:
 - Share at the depth you want others to share. Show them it’s okay to be vulnerable.
 - Stay within the time constraints. If everyone else only has 5 mins, then YOU only share for 5 mins.

- o Talk about *you* and what God revealed to you. Don't use your seat as the facilitator as an opportunity to teach or preach.

Keeping the Conversation On Track

- If Holy Spirit prompts you to help someone open up and share a little deeper, you can ask clarifying questions after they share. These are designed to take the discussion to another level. If someone just doesn't really share much you might choose to ask a follow-on question.
 - Examples:
 - o What do you think Holy Spirit might be saying to you through that thought?
 - o Why do you think that idea stood out to you?
 - o Is there a way that idea could be applied to your life?
 - o How can you, or how have you, seen that at work in your life?
- Some people may have a hard time getting to the point. They might go off on a complete tangent or start talking about what other people need to think or believe. Gently (or firmly) interrupt them and direct them back to the topic.
 - Examples:
 - o John, can you relate that back to this week's material?
 - o How does that thought/idea relate to you personally?
 - o What do you think God might be saying to YOU about that?
 - o How can you see that applying in your own life?
 - o Did Holy Spirit reveal something to you *personally* through this exercise?
- If anyone has not worked through much (or any) of the self-study during the week, encourage them to follow along in the material as the others in the group share and to pray asking that Holy Spirit would reveal truth to them right then and there, which they then may choose to share when it is their turn.
- Encourage everyone to share as you work around the circle, but allow an individual to "pass" if they're not comfortable sharing right now. The facilitator can circle back and ask them if they'd like to share later. It's not required to share in the group session. Just encourage them to lean in and seek Holy Spirit guidance on what they might share and when.

- The goal is to help people experience the reading material, the associated scriptures, and the questions for each day through the voice of Holy Spirit. It's totally okay to say, "What is Holy Spirit saying to you through this material?" or even, "Go ahead and ask Holy Spirit right now what he wants you to know about this?"
- When someone shares something emotional or traumatic the tendency can be to comfort. This is important:
 - Let Holy Spirit be the Comforter.
 - Give Him space to speak directly to each heart.
- You may feel led to bring God in to do the ministering and comforting by praying for the person after they have shared something emotionally difficult. "I'm so sorry that happened to you, JoAnne. Do you mind if I just pray for you right now?"
- Remain sensitive to Holy Spirit's leading. In Week 5, for example, Holy Spirit may lead you to help a person work through clearing a heart blockage . . .

Perhaps a group member had a teacher who called them stupid as a child and that lie has stayed with them leaving a wound in their soul. Once the memory has been identified, encourage them to seek forgiveness for believing the lie, extend forgiveness to the person who caused the wound, renounce the lie in Jesus name, and ask Holy Spirit to fill them with peace and joy where there was pain. Ask Holy Spirit to continue the restoration process in their soul.

Things for Watch Out For

- It is very common to have one or more people who are accustomed to the "Popcorn" style conversation of a typical Bible study where participants make comments on what one another shares. This is not the format used in Freedom.

We need to make sure:

- o Everyone has an equal opportunity to share. Don't let the meeting be dominated by those who have a comment to make on everything while two-thirds of the people never get a chance to speak.
 - o People are free to share without the fear that others will try to "fix" them or tell them what they need to think or do.
 - o The things that people share are about themselves and God. Not their opinion or suggestions for someone else in the group.
- Make sure and explain the format as you begin the first week and share a "quick reminder" at the beginning of every week.
 - Some who are used to a popcorn style of "group conversation" may feel that we are trying to "quench" or "stifle" Holy Spirit by sticking to the Freedom circle format. Rest assured, Holy Spirit is quite capable of communicating to every heart when we give Him space to do so.
 - There may be times when the facilitator feels led to stop the flow of the discussion to pray for a participant, ask the group to pray for them, ask the participant if they want to pray, etc. This should be done only at the discretion of the facilitator.
 - Encourage people to keep their comments about what Holy Spirit is revealing to *them* personally and about what *they* are learning through the Freedom experience as opposed to commenting directly to, or about, another participant.
 - Often you may have one or more people who are naturally gifted as teachers and will feel compelled to explain things to other people. This is not the forum for teaching or preaching! Each person should have their opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings freely without the fear of being taught, corrected, or preached to.
 - Protect your people by not allowing any individual to hijack the circle – or even the before and after time – by promoting their political agenda, their own ministry, their business, etc. We want to foster new relationships and help people make new connections within the church. But we need to make sure we don't allow our group to be a pool of prospects, a marketing channel, or a captive audience with which to advance any cause other than Jesus!
 - If while using these guidelines and suggestions you still have a participant who is "coloring outside the lines," please contact your coach after the

meeting. Don't be afraid to ask for help! We need to protect the quality of this experience for the people who are there for Freedom.

- Some people may feel that they aren't "learning" anything through the self-study, especially in the early weeks. The workbook, the related scriptures, and the associated questions are designed to help people engage with the voice of Holy Spirit so He can reveal things to that person. Holy Spirit always has MUCH more to reveal to us if we are willing to listen.
- Some people may not be ready to share much, especially in the early weeks. That is totally fine. Trust that just by being in the room and in the presence of the Lord that Holy Spirit is doing His work.
- If a participant asks questions about Bayside policies or beliefs, please direct them to church staff. Keep the focus on Freedom.
- If anyone in your group needs more one-on-one guidance or counselling, please them refer them to the Bayside Care Department.

Wrapping Up Circle Time

- Make sure you end on time!
- The facilitator should end with prayer. You can ask if anyone has specific prayer requests that you may choose to incorporate to your closing prayer.
- Share important dates such as Freedom Weekend and group meetings.

Between Group Meetings

- As you feel led to . . . feel free to email the group to encourage them and perhaps mention the topic for the upcoming session. You can also text or call individual members to touch base or let them know you are praying for them.

Last Group Meeting (Session #8)

- This is a celebration meeting where group members can share their experience during the group as well as at the Freedom Weekend experience.

- Encourage each member to sign up for a Bayside Group (small group), perhaps register for a Living in Freedom group, and to join a Serve Team. Hopefully they already initiated that at Freedom Weekend.
- Remind participants that freedom is an ongoing process. God tends to reveal one layer of Freedom at a time. It's not a one and done.
- Always be looking for new Freedom leaders. In most cases, it's best to let them get through their Freedom experience, including Freedom Weekend, before approaching them about serving.

Top 10 Reminders for Leading a Life-Changing Freedom Group

1. **Let God transform you.** For your own spiritual health and growth, read the material and seek the Lord about what's currently going on in your life. Not only will you discover new opportunities to experience more Freedom for yourself but you'll be able to share about what God is doing in your life right now!
2. **Lead but don't teach.** Freedom should be an encounter with Holy Spirit, not a class that has to be taught. Avoid explaining or summarizing what's in the workbook. Before each person shares – if you need to say anything at all – ask a question instead of making a statement. Ask something like, “What has Holy Spirit revealed to you this week?” or “How has God been speaking to you?”
3. **Leave space for God to speak.** As the leader we sometimes feel the need to say something after a participant shares or while they are having an emotional moment. You or other participants can feel compelled to console or comfort. Let the group know that you may intentionally embrace a bit of silence as needed. Leave space to let Holy Spirit do the ministering!
4. **Be an active listener.** People can tell by your body language if you are engaged with what they are saying. Maintain eye contact with the person speaking. Suspend judgement. Do not interrupt. Listen with a desire to understand their heart and their situation. Even pray silently for them as they speak. Your example will encourage the other group members to do the same.
5. **Create a safe space.** Remind people that what is said in the circle, stays in the circle. Make sure people feel safe sharing deep and hard things by not allowing anyone (including yourself) to get into counseling, preaching, or trying to fix each other's problems. Make way for Holy Spirit to bring truth, wisdom, and healing.
6. **Model the sharing.** At least one facilitator should share at the beginning of each circle time. This sets the tone and lets people know the depth at

which they can share and about how long they should go. Be real and share what God is doing in *your* heart.

7. **Encourage people to share about *themselves*.** We want to know what's going on in their heart. How is the reading and their time with the Lord impacting *them*? If they are using words like "I," "me," "my," and "we" (if a couple), that's perfect. If they are saying "you" or "we" (directed toward those in the group), or "people" (what others should think or do) gently bring them back to making it about *them*.
8. **Manage the clock.** After praying in, quickly get through any announcements or logistics and get right into the introductory video. From there, go right into the circle asking whoever is first, "What did Holy Spirit reveal to you this week?" Let people know you might ask them to wrap things up (if they go long) so they are not surprised. Make sure everyone has an opportunity to share.
9. **Pray for people as appropriate.** As you go around the circle, you may feel led to bring God in to do the ministering and comforting by praying for the person after they have shared something emotionally difficult. Example: "I'm so sorry that happened to you, JoAnne. Do you mind if I just pray for you right now?" You can also say, "Can I pray for you?" as a way to help someone wrap up their sharing so you can move along.
10. **Ask for prayer requests at the end of each session.** If you run out of time, you can use email, text, or a phone call. Consider having note cards available for people to write down their requests as they leave. There's no better way to understand what challenges your group members are facing than to ask for their specific prayer requests.



Bayside partners with a ministry called *Elevate Him Ministries* for a 4-Day Fully Alive Retreat!

You, too, can participate in this transformative four-day retreat designed to create space for the Holy Spirit to move powerfully in your life. This time will allow you to draw closer to Jesus and discover new pathways and levels of freedom and intimacy with our Lord!

To continue the Freedom Journey, visit this link:

www.elevatehim.com/fullyalive/

Upcoming Fully Alive Retreat Dates for 2025: **April**

24th–27th

October 9th–12th